

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION REVIEW

A. Background

BLM Office: Ashland Field Office

NEPA No: DOI-BLM-OR-ORWA-M060-2024-0004-CX

Proposed Action Title/Type: Boaz Mortality Salvage

Location of the Proposed Action: Lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) within the Ashland Field Office in the vicinity of Grouse Creek and Boaz Mountain, Medford District, Jackson County, Oregon.

Salvage Units: 23-01, 26-01, 26-02, 27-03, 27-04, 27-05, 27-06, 34-01, 34-02, 34-03, 35-03, 35-04, and 35-05, in Sections 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 34, and 35, T. 39 S., R. 3 W., W.M.

BLM Roads: 39-3-27.0, 39-3-27.1, 39-3-27.2, 39-3-26.0, and 39-3-35.0

Watershed: The project is in the Little Applegate River and Upper Applegate River 5th field watersheds.

Description of the Proposed Action:

The Ashland Field Office is proposing a salvage timber sale on up to 250 acres to mitigate hazard trees and recover economic value from dead or dying trees. Due to ongoing drought conditions and associated beetle infestations, many Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) stands in the proposed area are experiencing high levels of mortality (Bennett et al. 2023) (Refer to Appendix A for additional background information). Dead and dying trees need to be removed to address fuel loading and public safety concerns.

Salvage harvesting is the removal of dead trees or of trees damaged or dying because of injurious agents other than competition, to recover their economic value (2016 SWO ROD/RMP, p. 312). The project would also include the cutting of hazard trees, which consist of dead and dying trees that are within striking distance of roads or other targets. In steep terrain, striking distance is typically one to one and a half tree lengths below the target and one and a half to two tree lengths above the target (Filip et al. 2016, pp. 38-42).

In this project, the purchaser would use a combination of logging systems to remove logs including ground-based, cable, and skyline systems. Implementation of the mortality salvage is expected to begin during Fiscal Year 2024 and take approximately one year to complete.

Actions Within LUAs (See Appendix B, Map 1)

The BLM proposes tree falling and removal associated with insect and disease mortality and hazardous trees within Harvest Land Base (HLB), District Designated Reserve (DDR), and Riparian Reserve – Dry (RR-Dry) Land Use Allocations (LUAs) under the 2016 Southwestern Oregon Record of Decision/ Resource Management Plan (2016 SWO ROD/RMP); U.S. Department of the Interior (USDI 2016a, Map 2).

Table 1: Mortality Salvage Unit Acres by LUA.

Land Use Allocation	Acres
HLB	208
DDR	41
RR-Dry	1
Total	250

Stands were proposed for treatment based on observed signs of tree decline in combination with environmental conditions that increase the risk of FFB mortality: low elevation, aspect, topographic position, climate, and observed signs of tree decline. Experienced forest professionals would designate trees for cutting/salvage harvesting based on a combination of factors but utilizing a tree risk assessment developed based on local research (OSU Extension Service 2023).

Table 2: Signs of Tree decline

Selection Criteria	Determination of Dead or Dying
Degree of crown fading	Presence of red needles and dead/dying branches within tree crown
Pitch Jewels	Presence of small clear pitch droplets
Percentage of live crown	< 30% live crown
Quantity of stress crop	Overabundance of cones
FFB pitch tubes	Presence of pitch tubes and missing or deteriorating bark
Proximity to dead trees	Presence of dead Douglas-fir
Proximity to Oregon white oak stands	Nearby Oregon white oak stands indicate that Douglas-fir is near its lower threshold of water availability
Quality of foliage	Fading green crowns

Timely salvage is critical to capture the remaining merchantable timber values before further deterioration occurs. Salvaging dead and dying trees would allow the BLM to retrieve some economic value from these trees. The project would also reduce excessive fuel loading and lessen hazards during future land management work or firefighter responses. The purchaser would utilize salvaged trees under 36 inches diameter at breast height (DBH) for commercial or non-commercial purposes. The BLM would only approve felling of trees 36 inches DBH or larger if they pose a hazard, as identified above (second paragraph under Description of the Proposed Action) and the purchaser would leave these trees in the stand and not utilize them for commercial purposes. The purchaser would lop and scatter (L&S) or pile activities fuels that remain after the salvage harvest

depending on the density of the stand, access to stands, visibility to the public and if a stand overlaps with a fuels unit that is in a maintenance cycle (See Table 3).

Table 3: Activity Fuels Treatment by Unit:

Unit Number	Acres	Activity Fuels Treatment
23-01	17	Hand Pile
26-01	13	Hand Pile
26-02	60	Hand Pile
27-03	6	L & S
27-04	10	L & S
27-05	17	L & S
27-06	16	L & S
34-01	10	L & S
34-02	16	L & S
34-03	7	L & S
35-03	36	L & S
35-04	4	L & S
35-05	38	Hand Pile

HLB and DDR: Within the HLB, salvage treatments would target dead and dying trees with a moderate to high probability of mortality in the next few years (see Appendix B). DDR-Timber Productivity Capability Classification “Very Dry” would be surveyed for salvage treatment. Treatments in these areas would be site-specific and approved by the field office soil scientist. Under both LUAs, trees identified as hazard trees would also be removed for commercial sale.

RR-Dry and LSR-Dry: Treatments would remove dead and dying Douglas-fir along roads in RR-Dry and LSR-Dry that are identified to have likely or imminent-failure potential as specified in the Field Guide for Danger Tree Identification and Response along Forest Roads and Work Sites in Oregon and Washington (Filip et al. 2016, pp. 25-31). The removal of hazard trees would occur in RR-Dry located within unit 27-04 as well as RR-Dry and LSR-dry located outside units where the trees need to be felled to protect public safety or to keep roads and other infrastructure clear of debris within the project area (USDI 2016a, p. 71, p. 75). Where possible, identified hazard trees that would be left on the ground within the RR-Dry would be felled towards the stream channels. The BLM hydrologist, soil scientist, and fish biologist would approve all treatment areas identified within RR-Dry.

Table 4: Type of Proposed Treatment in Each LUA:

Land Use Allocation	Salvage of Dead or Dying Trees	Removal of Hazard Trees
HLB	Yes	Yes
DDR	Yes (With approval)	Yes
RR-Dry	No	Yes
LSR-Dry	No	Yes

Table 5: Unit Acres by LUA:

Unit	HLB	DDR	RR-Dry	LSR-Dry	Total*
23-01	14	3	0	0	17
26-01	11	2	0	0	13
26-02	51	9	0	0	60
27-03	6	0	0	0	6
27-04	9	<1	1	0	10
27-05	14	3	0	0	17
27-06	16	0	0	0	16
34-01	9	1	0	0	10
34-02	15	1	0	0	16
34-03	6	<1	0	0	7
35-03	26	10	0	0	36
35-04	2	2	0	0	4
35-05	29	9	0	0	38
Total	208	41	1	0	250

*Sum of LUA acres may not equal total acres due to rounding error.

Visual Resource Management

All Boaz Mortality Salvage Units fall within Visual Resources Management Class IV lands (USDI 2016a, p. 114). In these lands, the BLM could manage the areas for high levels of change to the characteristic landscape. Management activities may dominate the view and be the major focus of viewer attention.

Project Design Features

Salvage activities would include the implementation of Project Design Features (PDFs) and applicable Best Management Practices (BMPs) in Appendix C of the 2016 SWO ROD/RMP. PDFs are an integral part of the Proposed Action and have been developed to avoid or reduce the potential for adverse impacts to resources. The following PDFs are included in this project.

General Operations

- The purchaser would provide sufficient warning signs to control traffic on all major haul roads where they pass through the contract area whenever harvest operations are occurring.
- The purchaser would meet current state fire regulations.

Activity Fuels

- The purchaser would treat slash generated by logging activities using an appropriate method specified by the BLM.

Hydrology/Soils

- The purchaser would clean road surfaces, ditches, and culvert catch basins of slash and debris.
- The purchaser would re-install any road barricade removed as a result of harvest activities.
- The purchaser would only use native surface roads during the dry season (May 15th to October 15th). The purchaser could use roads between Oct 15th – Dec 1st and April 1st – May 15th if the road is sufficiently dry to protect both the road and resource values. The purchaser would suspend road use during precipitation events or if monitoring indicates that saturated soils exist to the extent that there is potential for causing elevated stream turbidity and sedimentation. If the purchaser proposed road use during the wet season, the BLM contract administrator would consult with the appropriate resource specialists (hydrology, soils, fisheries) to determine if additional mitigation is required or if road use is appropriate for the conditions.
- The BLM would permit road use on adequately surfaced roads (aggregate, chip seal, paved) during the wet season in consultation with a soils or aquatic specialist; however, the purchaser would suspend road use when conditions could potentially cause elevated stream turbidity and sedimentation.
- The BLM would approve all tractor skid trail locations prior to construction. The skid trails would cover no more than 15 percent of the harvest unit by area. Existing skid trails would be utilized when possible.
- The purchaser would equip tractors with integral arches to obtain one-end log suspension during log skidding. The BLM contract administrator would not approve tractor operations and skid trail locations on ground with slopes over 35 percent and areas with high water tables. This PDF would minimize areas affected by tractors and other mechanical equipment (disturbance, particle displacement, deflection, and compaction) and thus minimize soil productivity loss.
- The BLM would generally approve tractor yarding on designated skid trails from May 15th to October 15th. Depending upon weather and soil moisture conditions, the BLM contract administrator could vary these dates in consultation with the hydrology or soils resource specialist. To ensure that soil rutting or displacement beyond the skid trail does not occur, the BLM contract administrator would determine if soil moisture content is 25 percent or less in consultation with the soils resource specialist before they approve tractor yarding on designated skid trails.
- The purchaser would waterbar all skid trails according to BLM standards. Where soil erosion is not expected to occur (e.g., flat ground), the BLM may deem waterbars not necessary. The purchaser would camouflage and block all main tractor skid trails by scattering slash and other debris where they intersect haul roads and radiate from landings. They would place material, such as logs and other organic debris, along the entire length of skid trails where the BLM determines it is needed. This PDF would minimize erosion and routing of overland flow to streams by decreasing disturbance (e.g., unauthorized use by off-highway vehicles (OHVs)).

- Skyline corridors would be as narrow as operationally feasible and would not exceed 15 feet wide. As practicable, the BLM would not approve corridors spaced less than 100 feet apart where physical topography, or operational constraints demand they cross streams. Overall, the purchaser would space corridors 200 feet apart where operationally feasible.
- Immediately after use, the purchaser would construct waterbars by hand in cable yarding corridors where gouging occurs. Where gouging of mineral soil occurs for a continuous distance of 20 feet or more, the purchaser would cover exposed soil with available slash. The BLM would direct the purchaser on where waterbar construction and slash cover is needed.
- The purchaser would apply native, site-specific seed approved by the field office botanist and weed-free straw to the top 20 feet of the skyline-cable yarding corridor where yarding logs to the road results in extended soil exposure.
- The BLM would restrict tractor and mechanical operations to slopes generally less than 35 percent. In areas where it is necessary to exceed these gradients to access adjacent tractor area, the equipment would follow ridge tops where possible.
- The purchaser would fully or partially suspend logs when skyline-cable yarding.

Wildlife

- If new spotted owls are located or occupancy status has changed within the project area, the Level 1 Team would be notified so they can evaluate whether consultation must be reinitiated.
- The wildlife biologist and prescription writer would work together when marking salvage units to ensure treatments remove dead and dying trees and limit the effects to those as described for this project. If conditions have changed and the effects would exceed the consultation, then units would be dropped, modified, or consultation would be reinitiated.
- Activities (such as tree felling, yarding, road construction, hauling on roads not generally used by the public, prescribed fire, muffled blasting) that produce loud noises above ambient levels would not occur within specified distances (Appendix A-1) of any owl site between March 1 and July 15 (or until two weeks after the fledging period) – unless protocol surveys have determined the activity center is non-nesting or failed in their nesting attempt. The distances may be shortened if significant topographical breaks or blast blankets (or other devices) muffle sound traveling between the work location and nest sites.
- The action agency has the option to extend the restricted season until September 30 during the year of harvest, based on site-specific knowledge (such as a late or recycle nesting attempt) if project would cause a nesting spotted owl to flush (See disturbance distance).
- Burning would not take place within 0.25 miles of spotted owl sites between March 1 and July 15 (or until two weeks after the fledging period) unless substantial smoke would not drift into the nest stand.

Botany/Noxious Weeds

- The BLM would complete surveys for botanical resources prior to ground-disturbing activities, wherever the BLM has not previously surveyed or where the field office botanist determines previous surveys were longer adequate.
- Based on the recommendations of the field office botanist, the BLM would manage Endangered and Bureau Sensitive plant species locations discovered prior to project implementation for conservation.
- Prior to project implementation, the BLM Botanists will mark listed plant sites on the ground using yellow plant site signs. Additionally, yellow and black “bumble bee” flagging will be used to distinguish the site boundaries. Site boundaries will comply with population buffering distances required by the project design criteria within the 2020 Biological Assessment of activities that may

affect the federally listed plant species, Gentner's Fritillary and Cook's Lomatium, on the Medford District BLM.

- The purchaser would exclude tree falling, skidding, and yarding within plant sites.
- The purchaser would not locate anchor trees within plant sites.
- The purchaser would not burn landing slash within 100 feet of plant sites.
- The purchaser would not use heavy equipment within plant sites, regardless of season. Heavy equipment includes tractors, dozers, loaders, graders, excavators, cranes, skid steers, and similar equipment. The project botanist could authorize the use of pick-up trucks, all-terrain vehicles, utility task vehicles, and similar soft-wheeled vehicles within a plant site on a limited basis in dry conditions in the dormant season.
- The purchaser would not construct new landings within 300 feet of *Fritillaria gentneri* (FRGE) sites.
- The BLM could authorize use of existing landings at least 100 feet away from FRGE sites.
- The BLM would inventory noxious weeds in and near all ground-disturbed areas and implement appropriate weed control measures taken per the Medford District BLM Integrated Invasive Plant Management Revised EA (2018).
- The purchaser would clean equipment and vehicles that leave established road surfaces of soil, seeds, vegetative matter, and other debris that could contain noxious weed seeds prior to entering BLM administered lands. If work occurs in an area known to contain priority non-native invasive plants, equipment shall be cleaned before moving to another project area. Areas appropriate for cleaning equipment prior to leaving the project area will be designated as appropriate. Cleaning may be accomplished by using a pressure hose.
- The purchaser would seed, re-vegetate, and/or mulch highly disturbed areas where project activities such as decommissioning and other such activities result in bare soil using certified weed-free mulch and/or native seed. Ensure hay, straw, and mulch are certified as free of prohibited noxious vegetative parts or seeds, per 75 FR 159:51102. Straw or hay must be obtained from the BLM or purchased from growers certified by the Oregon Department of Agriculture's Weed Free Forage and Mulch Program. Native seed mixes will be reviewed by the BLM botanist. Seeding would occur from September 1 to March 31.
- All material, including rock and gravel, utilized in the building, reconstruction, or maintenance of roads (temp, permanent, etc.) should be sourced from Oregon Department of Agriculture approved rock sources or from a BLM approved site that has been inspected and approved by a BLM botanist.

Archaeological/Paleontological/Cultural Resources

- The BLM will place a no-entry buffer around NRHP-listed or eligible/unevaluated archaeological sites located within the Area of Potential Effect. The BLM archaeologist will establish a buffer sufficient to protect each site from adverse impacts from any proposed activities, taking into account all elements of the site that contribute to its NRHP eligibility. No activities shall occur within this buffer including but not limited to tree felling, skid trails, hand or machine piling of slash or debris, log decks, or use of any mechanized equipment. Timber identified for removal next to a buffer would be directionally felled away from the buffer for one site-potential tree length.
- If, during project implementation, the purchaser, or anyone working on behalf of the purchaser, encounters or becomes aware of any archaeological, historical, or paleontological sites, features, or artifacts on federal lands, the purchaser shall immediately suspend all operations in the vicinity and notify the BLM Contracting Officer. The BLM Contracting Officer will consult with the Field Office Archaeologist and determine appropriate actions to prevent the loss of significant cultural or scientific values. The project may be redesigned to protect the cultural or scientific values present, or evaluation and mitigation procedures will be implemented based on recommendations from the Field Office Archaeologist with concurrence by the BLM Authorized Officer and State Historic Preservation Office.

Work may not proceed until authorization to proceed is issued by the Contracting Officer after approval by the Medford BLM Archaeologist.

B. Land Use Plan Conformance

Name of Land Use Plan (LUP): Southwestern Oregon Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan.

Date Approved/Amended: August 2016.

The Proposed Action is in conformance with the applicable provisions of the 2016 SWO ROD/RMP, as explained below:

1. In the HLB-Uneven-aged Timber Area (UTA), implement timber salvage harvest after disturbance events to recover economic value and to minimize commercial loss or deterioration of damaged trees where the BLM determines that removal is economically viable (USDI 2016a, p. 69).
 - In timber salvage harvest units, retain at least 5 percent of pre-harvest stand basal area in live trees or snags in individual harvest units. Retain trees and snags in a variety of spatial patterns, including aggregated groups and individual trees (USDI 2016a, p. 69).
 - After salvage harvest, use natural or artificial regeneration or both to reforest a mixture of species appropriate to the site to a stand-level average of at least 150 trees per acre (including surviving trees) within 5 years of harvest (USDI 2016a, p. 69).

Because this project involves timber salvage, the 2016 SWO ROD/RMP does not identify a requirement to retain or create snags or retain down woody material (USDI 2016a, pp. 62-63).

2. Within the Riparian Reserve LUA, hazard trees would be retained as down woody material within or adjacent to the stand or moved for placement in streams for fish habitat restoration, unless removal of logs through commercial harvest is necessary to maintain access to roads and facilities and protect public safety (USDI 2016a, p. 75).
3. The 2016 SWO ROD/RMP allows salvage logging in LSR when necessary to protect public safety, or to keep roads and other infrastructure clear of debris (USDI 2016a, p. 71).
4. Within District-Designated Reserves, maintain access to roads and facilities by removing hazard trees and blowdown. Such logs may be retained as down woody material, moved for placement in streams for fish habitat restoration, or removed through a commercial harvest or special forest products sale (USDI 2016a, pp. 54).
5. Management in Visual Resource Management Class IV areas (USDI 2016a, pp. 113-114):
 - a. Allows for high levels of change to the characteristic landscape,
 - b. May dominate the view, and
 - c. Can be the major focus of viewer attention.

C. Compliance with National Environmental Policy Act

The Proposed Action is categorically excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with 43 CFR 46.210 516 DM 11.9, C.8. "Salvaging dead or dying trees not to exceed 250 acres, requiring no more than 0.5 mile of temporary road construction."

Such activities:

- May include incidental removal of live or dead trees for landings, skid trails, and road clearing.

For this Categorical Exclusion (CX), a dying tree is defined as a standing tree that has been severely damaged by forces such as fire, wind, ice, insects, or disease, and that in the judgment of an experienced forest professional or someone technically trained for the work, is likely to die within a few years. For this Proposed Action, temporary road construction would not be necessary.

The Proposed Action also has a component that is categorically excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with 43 CFR 46.210 516 DM 11.9, C.2. “Sale and removal of individual trees or small groups of trees which are dead, diseased, injured, or which constitute a safety hazard, and where access for the removal requires no more than maintenance to existing roads.”

These categorical exclusions are appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment. The Proposed Action has been reviewed (Table 1), and none of the extraordinary circumstances¹ described in 43 CFR 46.215 and below apply.

Table 6. Extraordinary Circumstances Review.

The Proposed Action will not:

(a) Have significant impacts on public health or safety.
Rationale: Dead and dying trees pose a hazard to federal workers, contractors, and the public. The proposed action would remove hazard trees for the safety of the public driving on roads and to keep roads, and other infrastructure, clear of debris. With implementation of PDFs, there would be no potential for significant effects to public safety during operations, and after the conclusion of these treatments the risks to public safety from hazardous trees would be reduced. Operations would follow Federal and State Occupational Safety and Health Administration standards designed to prevent job-related illness or injuries. Operations would fall standing trees that pose a hazard to the work site.
(b) Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources, park, recreation, or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sold or principle drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order 11990); floodplains (Executive Order 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas.
Rationale: The proposed action would not occur on prime farmlands, within wetlands, or on other ecologically significant or critical areas identified above. The BLM Field Office archaeologist reviewed the project and any identified eligible or potentially eligible sites within the proposed area will be flagged for protection prior to project implementation. A PDF is included to protect any unidentified cultural site that may be found during implementation. The road system used for the project does not access any developed recreation sites and planned treatments comply with VRM and ERMA objectives.
(c) Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA Section 102 (2)(E)].
Rationale: Based on BLM’s experience with these types of activities, there are no predicted environmental effects from the Proposed Action that are considered to be highly controversial nor are there unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses. This project’s Categorical Exclusion Authority allows for the removal of dead and dying trees on up to 250 acres. Land Use Allocations and goals for the affected lands were

¹ This categorical exclusion is in compliance with the 1978 Council on Environmental Quality NEPA regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508).

established and analyzed under the 2016 SWO ROD/RMP and the corresponding environmental impact statement.
(d) Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.
Rationale: The activities proposed in this CX are long-standing practices on BLM-administered lands. The BLM interdisciplinary team of resource specialists reviewed this project and did not identify any highly uncertain, potentially significant, unique, or unknown risks.
(e) Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.
Rationale: The activities proposed in this CX are addressed and authorized under the 2016 SWO ROD/RMP. This project would implement decisions made in that land use plan. The proposed activities are widely used on federal lands throughout Oregon and there is no evidence this type of project would establish a precedent or decision for future actions that would have significant environmental effects.
(f) Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.
Rationale: The Proposed Action salvages dead and dying trees and hazard trees in the Ashland Field Office. The BLM interdisciplinary team reviewed the project and incorporated PDFs into the project design to minimize any potential impacts to resources and prevent off-site effects that would contribute to the cumulative effects of other projects in the area. The interdisciplinary team determined that the Boaz Mortality Salvage would not result in a cumulative significant effect when added to relevant past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions in the area. If mortality continues within the Little Applegate River and Upper Applegate River watersheds, future salvages exceeding this CX's authority of 250 acres would be addressed in an Environmental Assessment that will include the cumulative effects of this salvage.
(g) Have significant impacts or properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by either the bureau or office.
Rationale: No significant impacts would occur to listed, eligible to be listed, or unevaluated sites. PDFs have been incorporated into the project to protect sites listed, eligible to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, or currently unevaluated. Appropriate buffers will be implemented to protect site integrity. Any in-site treatments would only occur after consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office. If eligible sites are identified during treatment, then any in-site treatments would only occur after consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office.
(h) Have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on Critical Habitat for these species.
Rationale: The BLM wildlife biologist, botanist, and fish biologist have reviewed the areas proposed for treatment.-The project has incorporated PDFs to protect listed or proposed to be listed species and their habitats. The proposed action would implement appropriate buffers and seasonal restrictions to reduce impacts to threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat.
Wildlife: Consultation with the USFWS has been completed. Programmatic Biological Assessment (BA) <i>Programmatic Activities that May Affect the Northern Spotted Owl, Marbled Murrelet, Vernal Pool Fairy Shrimp, and Oregon Spotted Frog</i> (USDI 2017) was sent May 2017. The BLM received a Biological Opinion (BO) for the Medford BLM FY2017-2022 Wildlife Programmatic Biological Assessment from the USFWS on July 1, 2017. Verification of this project under the BO from the USFWS was received prior to the signing of the decision record for this project. The Ashland Field Manager would not issue a Decision Record for the Boaz Mortality Salvage until the verification is received. Project Design Features, which incorporates the Project Design Criteria located in the Medford FY2017-2022 Wildlife Programmatic Biological Assessment (May 8, 2017), will be used to avoid impacts to Northern Spotted Owls.
Botany: The BLM initiated programmatic Consultation for the Endangered Species Act (ESA) with the U.S.

Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) covering proposed activities through a Biological Assessment (BA). The BA for the *Assessment of activities that may affect the federally listed plant species, Gentner's Fritillaria and Cook's Lomatium, on the Medford District BLM* (USDI 2020), was sent October 2020 and the USFWS completed the consultation by returning a Letter of Concurrence (#01EOFW00-2021-I-0017). (USDI FWS 2020), BLM completed a project review, site-specific surveys of the project, and utilized Project Design Criteria as required by Botany USFWS Programmatic Consultation.

Fish: BLM also completed a site-specific review of the project with the FWS as required by the Consultation for the Biological Opinion. Consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for ESA or the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act is not needed as there are no listed fish species within the Project Area.

(i) Violate Federal law, or a State, local, Tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

Rationale: The proposed activities conform to the 2016 SWO ROD/RMPs' direction for management of public lands in the Medford District and comply with applicable laws, rules, and regulations.

(j) Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898).

Rationale: Similar actions have occurred throughout the Medford District and there is no evidence that this type of project would have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on said populations.

(k) Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (Executive Order 13007).

Rationale:

(l) Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native noxious species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and Executive Order 13112).

Rationale: The Proposed Action does not result in measurable changes to the current baseline of the risk, or actual introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species in or from the project area. The implementation of PDFs such as washing equipment prior to entry to the project area and not working in weed infested areas and the ongoing treatment of noxious weeds within the project area in accordance with the Medford District BLM Integrated Invasive Plant Management Revised EA (2018) would reduce the risk of introduction or spread of noxious weeds.

Supplemental Information

The BLM has completed surveys in all activity units for Threatened/Endangered and BLM Bureau Sensitive plants, as well as non-native invasive weeds. Four Threatened/Endangered and/or BLM Bureau Sensitive plant sites were documented and marked within the unit pool, including 3 *Fritillaria gentneri* (FRGE) sites.

The Ashland Field Office Archaeologist completed a cultural resource review of the proposed Salvage Project. Adequate previous survey has occurred in some of the units and no known cultural resource sites are located within the APE. Based on extensive pre-field research, the remainder of the units are areas with low potential for containing historic properties and were not surveyed per BLM Medford District/Oregon SHPO supplemental agreement as outlined in the 2015 State Protocol.

The purchaser would repair all existing roads used in conjunction with any salvage sale or contract upon completion of project. Roads could be closed on a temporary basis (up to an hour) for safety during logging operations.

D. Interdisciplinary Review

The following parties reviewed and/or contributed to the rationale provided for in Section C.

Name	Title/Expertise
Amanda Huffman	Wildlife Biologist
Jesse Kiene	Fuels Technician
Georgia Thomas	Botanist
Brian Long	Outdoor Recreation Planner
Matthew McClintock	Soils Biologist
Nate Chotlos	Silviculturist/Project Lead
Tim Montfort	Hydrologist
Tatiana Watkins	Archaeologist
Josh Robeson	Roads Engineer
Justin Cournoyer	Planning and Environmental Specialist
Chris Volpe	Fisheries Biologist
Jameson Whitehead	Outdoor Recreation Planner

Proposed Action Title/Type: Boaz Mortality Salvage

I considered the PDFs identified by specialists (see section A, Description of the Proposed Action) and their review of the project for any significant impacts in making my decision. No significant issues were identified.

E. Signature

Authorized Official/Date: _____

(Signature)

Name: Lauren P. Brown

Title: Field Manager

Office: Ashland Field Office



DECISION RECORD

Proposed Action Title/Type: Boaz Mortality Salvage

Decision and Rationale

The Boaz Mortality Salvage is necessary to address the issue of dead and dying trees that at this time have a monetary value, but in less than a year may not. Additionally, tree removal will help mitigate hazards posed by dead or dying trees near roads and fuels treatment areas and reduce the fuel load within the treated areas.

The project design and the incorporation of Project Design Features will sufficiently protect botanical, cultural, hydrologic, soils, recreation, and wildlife resources.

My decision is to implement the action as proposed in “Description of the Proposed Action” section of the CX, inclusive of all identified Project Design Features.

Administrative Remedies

A person adversely affected by this forest management decision may appeal the decision to the Interior Board of Land Appeals (Board), within the Office of the Secretary, Office of Hearings and Appeals. Appeals to the Board are governed by the Department’s regulations at 43 CFR Part 4. The BLM has provided the attached Form 1842-1 as a courtesy to assist a member of the public who chooses to appeal this decision. However, the appellant (the person filing the appeal) bears the responsibility to know, understand, and comply with the appeals regulations.

To appeal this decision, the appellant or designated representative (see 43 CFR § 1.3) must file a notice of appeal within thirty (30) calendar days from the date of the publication of this decision on the ePlanning website. Appeals must be addressed to the deciding official, Lauren Brown, 3040 Biddle Road, Medford, OR 97504, ATTN: AFO, Boaz Mortality Salvage. It is the responsibility of the deciding official to promptly transmit a notice of appeal to the Board. If the notice of appeal does not include a statement of reasons, the appellant must file the statement of reasons with the Board and the BLM within thirty (30) calendar days after the notice of appeal is filed. A copy of the notice of appeal, any statement of reasons, any written arguments, and any briefs must also be filed with the Office of the Regional Solicitor, Pacific Northwest Region, U.S. Department of the Interior, 601 SW 2nd Ave, Suite 1950, Portland, OR 97204-3172.

An appellant has the right to petition the Board to stay implementation of the decision. A petition for stay, if any, must accompany the notice of appeal, and be served upon the deciding official and the Office of the Regional Solicitor.

The BLM has revised the forest management regulations at 43 CFR 5000, and those revised regulations became effective on January 19, 2021. The Final Rule was published in the Federal Register on December 18, 2020 (85 FR 82359). In the Final Rule, the BLM eliminated the administrative protest provisions formerly found at 43 C.F.R. § 5003.3; accordingly, there is no opportunity to administratively protest this forest management decision.

Effective Date of Decision

My decision to implement the proposed action is effective immediately upon the posting of this Decision Record on the BLM NEPA Register (ePlanning), under 43 CFR §5003.1 and 5003.2.

Signature

Authorized Official/Date: _____

Lauren Brown

Field Manager

Ashland Field Office

Appendix A: Background

In recent years southwest Oregon forests have been facing high levels of Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) tree mortality. This is due to ongoing changes in climate including increasing temperatures, increasing drought frequency and severity, reduced snowpack, as well as fewer but more extreme precipitation events. The drought stress has weakened trees, making it more difficult to fight off insect infestations and has created favorable conditions for infestation of the Flatheaded fir borer beetles (FFB). The FFB generally behave as secondary pests attacking trees in poor vigor which have already been weakened or killed by bark beetles, root diseases, or fire. The FFB can also cause significant tree mortality or damage within dry forests and during drought, and can behave “very aggressively, attacking and killing Douglas-firs and true firs on drier sites such as valley fringe areas that were historically occupied by oaks” (Goheen, 2021, p. 56). In reviewing the U.S. Drought Monitor Categories for Jackson and Josephine Oregon counties, the trend over the past two decades indicates that projections of increased drought are on track (Figure 1). A recent U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) forest health report for Oregon finds that aerial survey and site visit trends “indicate that drought stress is one of the main causes of tree dieback and decline” (USDA 2020, p. 5).

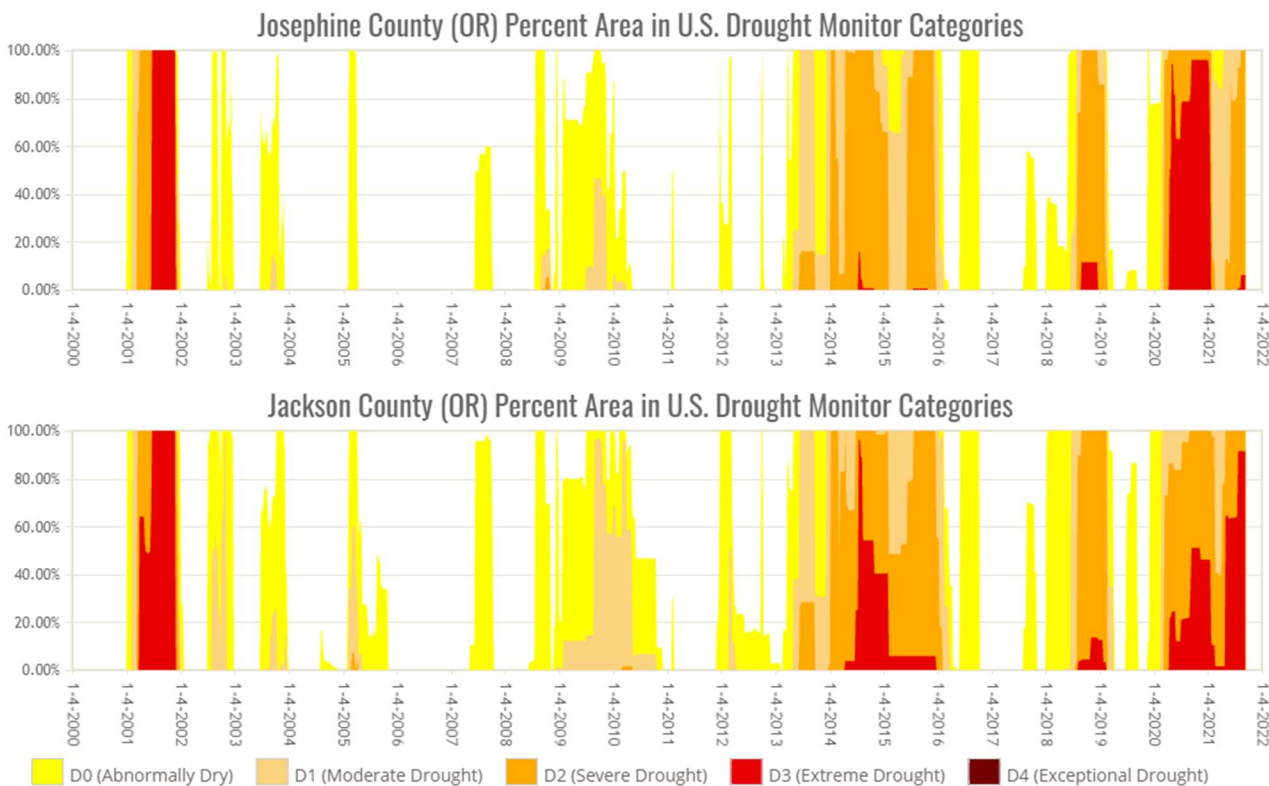


Figure 1. U.S. Drought Monitor Category graphs displaying percent area in various drought categories for Josephine and Jackson Co. from Jan 2000 to Sep. 2021. Data acquired from <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/DmData/TimeSeries.aspx>

The severe/extreme drought of 2021 along with the impacts of the heat dome during June of 2021 will likely have a noticeable impact of increased tree mortality, the impact of which is still not fully realized due to the lag time of tree mortality. The BLM anticipates that drought conditions will continue, along with this issue of increased tree mortality. The Climate Change section of the Proposed Resource Management Plan/ Final Environmental Impact Statement for Western Oregon (PRMP/FEIS) (USDI BLM 2016b, pp. 165-211), analyzes issues associated with climate change. Issue 3 in the PRMP/FEIS, “How would climate interact with

BLM management actions to alter the potential outcomes for key natural resources” (USDI BLM 2016b, p. 180), describes potential impacts to tree species, insects and pathogens, and describes the assumptions applied to the climate modelling for use in the 2016 SWO RMP/ROD. Issue 3 of the PRMP/FEIS describes the complications and unknowns in predicting the effects of climate change. The BLM anticipates the decline of Douglas-fir, particularly in lower elevations. Tree mortality will increase due to the interactions of changing climate with disturbance events such as drought, fire, insects, and diseases. Species composition will likely shift, and growth rates and overall site productivity will decline (USDI BLM 2016b, pp. 193-196). The high levels of tree mortality are found in some of the driest and lowest site productivity areas within the Ashland Field Office and it is possible these areas are no longer suitable for Douglas-fir persistence due to persistent hot droughts (USDA 2020, p. 5).

Common factors observed within areas of widespread mortality include lower levels of precipitation (>40 inches of annual precipitation), lower elevations (>3,500 ft), stands with a white oak component, areas proximate to recent/ongoing tree mortality, areas at or near a stand edge or ridge, and harsher aspects (south and southwest). There are noticeable signs of a tree under stress/dying with pitch streaming out of the bole, a stress crop of cones, red branches, and skeleton branches where the red needles have already been lost. The foliage can be chlorotic with more yellow or light green coloring and with the loss in foliage the crowns are easier to see through. Small jewel-like pitch tubes are evident on many of the infested trees. Woodpeckers shave bark off of infested green Douglas-fir to feed on FFB. Often the concentrated pockets of dead trees are surrounded radially with trees showing signs of recent or ongoing mortality. There is also an observed connection of proximity to Oregon white oak, which is typically in very dry sites.

Potential effects of this continuation of conifer mortality include increased fuel loading and wildfire risk; decreased commercial value of standing timber; a shift in species composition to hardwoods, shrubs, and other non-host conifer species; changes in wildlife habitat; and threats to safety along traveled roadways, fire suppression and reforestation efforts in areas with high volumes of standing and downed dead trees.

Appendix A-1

Appendix A-1. Mandatory Restriction Distances to Avoid Disturbance to Spotted Owl Sites	
Activity	Buffer Distance Around Owl Site
Heavy Equipment (including non-blasting quarry operations)	105 feet
Chain saws	195 feet
Impact pile driver, jackhammer, rock drill	195 feet
Small helicopter or plane	360 feet*
Type 1 or Type 2 helicopter	0.25 mile*
Blasting: 2 lbs. of explosive or less	360 feet
Blasting: more than 2 lbs. of explosives	1 mile

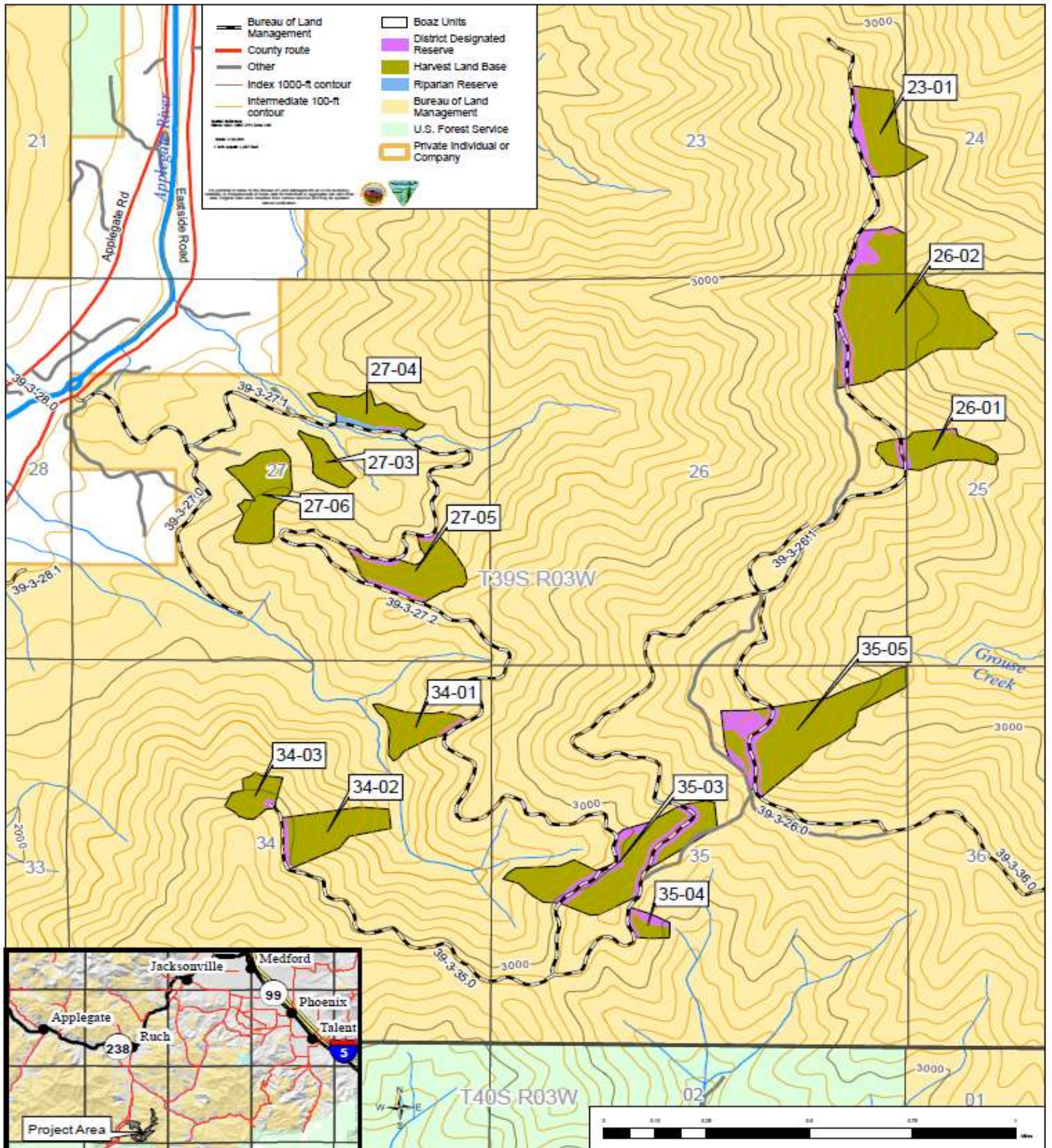
* If below 1,500 feet above ground level

Appendix B: Maps

Map 1: Identification of Units and LUAs Within Project Area

Boaz Mortality Salvage TS

T39S R03W Sec 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 34, and 35



Appendix C: References

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Goheen, E.M. and E.A. Willhite. 2021. Field Guide to Common Diseases and Insect Pests of Oregon and Washington Conifers. Rev. ed. R6-FHP-RO-2021-01. Portland OR: USDA Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Region. 325 p.

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USDI 2016a. Bureau of Land Management. August 2016. Southwestern Oregon Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan.

USDI 2016b. Bureau of Land Management. 2016. Proposed Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement.

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USDI FWS 2017. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. July 11, 2017. Formal Consultation on the Medford District Bureau of Land Management’s Batch of Routine Activities that May Affect Listed Species or their Designated Critical Habitat (TAILS: 01EOFW00-2017-F-0374).

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